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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with:

Tucker Steinmetz
Little Rock, Arkansas
4 May 2007

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is May 4, 2007. I'm here in Little Rock, Arkansas, preparing to interview Tucker Steinmetz for the *Arkansas Democrat* Project sponsored by the Pryor Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville]. The first thing I need to do, Tucker, is to ask you if I have your permission to tape this interview and turn it over to the university.

TS: Absolutely. Yes. Glad to do it.

JM: Now, then, first let's start out with—let's just start at the beginning. Well, let me say this: I know that you worked at both the *Democrat* and the [Arkansas] *Gazette*, as well as a couple of other newspapers before you ever came to the *Democrat*. But we're going to just go back and start at the beginning. First thing, just spell your name for me.

TS: Okay. Steinmetz is S-T-E-I-N-M-E-T-Z.

JM: Okay. And it's Tucker—T-U-C-K-E-R.

TS: T-U-C-K-E-R. Yes.

JM: Okay. Where and when were you born, Tucker?

TS: I was born in Fort Smith [on] March 28, 1941, so I am sixty-six years old.

JM: Oh, okay. What were your parents' names?

TS: Cecil Steinmetz, who was a stereotyper on the Fort Smith paper [Southwest American] until we moved away from Fort Smith in about 1943, and he went to the *Delta Democrat Times*—stayed there a year and then ultimately ended up at the *Gazette*. He retired from the *Gazette* as a stereotype foreman. And my mother was Verba Steinmetz. She was a registered nurse and she actually just died a little over two years ago. She was almost ninety-eight years old.

JM: Oh.

TS: She outlived my father by about thirteen years. We settled in North Little Rock when I was about five years old, so I grew up there—went to school there. I graduated from North Little Rock High School and went on to Hendrix College and got a B.A. in English. Then I went to the University—later in life—mid-life—went to the Graduate School of Social Work at UALR [University of Arkansas, Little Rock].

JM: Okay.

TS: And got my master of social work. So I had about a ten-year career in journalism which followed three years of teaching school down on the border in El Paso, Texas.

JM: Oh, boy. Okay, you graduated from Hendrix . . .

TS: Class of 1963.

JM: Class of 1963. Any other journalists in that class or that era or anything? I know I hired several that came out of there, but they were a little bit later, I think.

TS: Yes, I don't think there were any other journalists that came out of there—not that I'm aware of.

JM: Yes, well, I know . . .

TS: Later on, yes. I've run into some, you know, who went to—Hendrix people.

JM: I hired three or four myself when I was at the *Democrat* . . .

TS: Yes.

JM: Mel White and then David Terrell.

TS: Yes.

JM: And Patti Cox—Patti Shields—but—Cox. So when did you get interested in journalism?

TS: Well, I'd always been interested in writing. I liked writing in high school—worked on the high school paper. I started out to be a Methodist minister, and it was to the good fortune of the Methodist church I didn't stay with that very long. But I—probably better for me, too. [Laughs] I don't think I would've been a good fit, but I had always been interested. I grew up around newspapers. I loved to go see my father at work.

JM: Yes.

TS: And my earliest memories are of the *Delta Democrat Times* in Greenville, Mississippi.

JM: Greenville.

TS: The Hodding Carter paper.

JM: Yes.

TS: My father would take me down to the paper, and I liked to be there when the press would start. I *loved* hearing the bells ring on that press. Of course, that press seemed really big to me then. I'm sure it was not a particularly large press in the middle 1940s. But there was an old janitor there named Willie who always gave me a nickel and a pecan. That was kind of traditional. So I loved the paper. And as I grew up, I always knew that my daddy was the foreman for many years at the stereotype department at the *Gazette*, and I always knew those back shop guys well, and I liked to go there. And after I was a teenager and driving, I loved to go over there at night and just go see my daddy at work and be around that paper. There was just something that always excited me about it. So I left—after Hendrix I went to a school called the Lydia Patterson Institute which was a high school and junior high operated by the Methodist church about ten blocks from the border in El Paso, Texas. I taught English there and had a wonderful experience. I kind of about starved. By the time I was through there, I had two children. I had a daughter born there. I had a son born while I was at Hendrix. And I was ready to leave El Paso, and I just decided I wanted to go into journalism. So I wrote A. R. Nelson at the *Gazette*, and he said, “Well, we’re only looking for experienced people.” So I don’t remember how I found out about Bob Fisher, and I kind of think—yes, I do. I believe Bob [Robert] McCord gave him my name because I called Bob. I had known Bob since I was in high school. I’m a great admirer of Bob McCord, and subsequently became a great admirer of Bob Fisher. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

TS: They were friends.

JM: Yes.

TS: For a long, long time they had been friends. So I went down to the *Crossett* [Arkansas?] *News Observer* and I worked there about six months. It was wonderful working with Bob [Fisher]. I got to try some things out.

JM: For Fisher, then?

TS: Yes.

JM: Okay. Yes.

TS: And I got to do a little—wrote a little column and I wrote some features, and I covered some news and enjoyed it. Foreman—Gene Foreman was at the *Pine Bluff* [Arkansas] *Commercial*. He was the news editor at that time, and he called me up one night in Crossett and asked if I'd be interested in working for him. I, you know, was intrigued, and I guess, honestly, flattered, you know? [Laughs] I'm this little guy down here in a small-town weekly newspaper, and some editor calls you up and says, "I've been reading your stuff, and I'd like to talk to you about coming to work for us." So, "Well, yes." I got up there as quick as I could. [Laughs] I went up there and interviewed and was hired, and I went to work at the *Commercial*. I don't know where you want me to go with that.

JM: No, keep going.

TS: Okay. So I went to the *Commercial* and worked there from—about two years, starting in around August of 1966. Right away I got a chance to—I was working on the regional desk, and Foreman had this great—he has always had this great interest in young journalists and promoting their career—their development as writers. He was a wonderful editor. He could write the crispest little note. He once wrote me a note that said, "You have managed to mix five metaphors in one

paragraph.” But I loved his notes. But, anyway, Foreman and I hit it off well. We were neighbors, it turned out, when I moved to Pine Bluff, and we rode to work together a lot. He let me cover a lot of things that I probably was not ready for, but he oversaw what I was doing. He gave great critiques and great encouragement. He was a great encourager. And I ended up the fall of 1966 getting to write a piece—or a series—I got to go up to Michigan and interview a guy who had run off from Tucker Prison Farm. He had quite a story to tell, and he successfully fought extradition at Flint, Michigan. So I went up there and interviewed him and wrote a series of articles which kind of caused a little stir. And so when the prison scandal broke in 1967 in January, a few months later—when [Winthrop] Rockefeller came into office [as Arkansas governor], Foreman just sort of let me go write about the prisons. And that took the bulk of my time for the next two years—more than anything else, that’s what I did.

JM: Yes.

TS: So I guess it’s the way of saying I became a real follower of Gene. I liked his honesty. He just taught you a lot about journalistic ethics and how to write—how to dig out a story. So I was committed to him—would’ve worked for him anywhere. So when he was hired when Mr. [K. August] Engel died, and the *Democrat* passed to the nephews [Marcus George and Stanley Berry]—Gene was hired by them to remake the paper. I had never aspired to go to the *Democrat*.

JM: Oh.

TS: I saw the *Democrat* as primarily a rewrite operation where—in fact, when I got there that was confirmed, you know? They waited for their—some of them waited kind of like baby birds to be fed. They were given their *Gazette* rewrites

to [do].

JM: Yes.

TS: But I'd go anywhere Foreman asked me to go. He went up there, and he called me. He said, "Would you like to come to work up here?" And I said, "Yes." So I moved to North Little Rock, my old home town where I had graduated from high school. I moved there and started work for the *Democrat* for Foreman. It was really [laughs] an interesting and challenging experience from the beginning because he had been told, "Change things. Remake this paper." But, you know, I'm sure they had their resource limitations. I don't know. I mean, the paper wasn't that well-heeled. And those were in the days when the *Democrat* still paid in cash. You got your pay every week. These days they'd be afraid someone would walk off the street and walk in there and rob them, but they kept it in a—it was in these trays [laughs]—you know, those envelopes with the money stuffed in them. They said that in a former day, Mr. Engel himself handed it out. And the story always was that he kind of held onto it until you had firmly snatched it . . .

JM: [Laughs]

TS: . . . from his grasp. [Laughs] But it was a challenge. It was tense at times because the old hands were not particularly enamored of the changes Foreman was making.

[TS's cell phone rings] Could you hold that one minute?

[Tape Stopped]

TS: Well, I was saying that the old hands were a little suspicious, and I can understand that. There had been a changing of the guard. You had people who had been there for years. Some of them regarded Foreman with great suspicion because he

was so direct, so knowledgeable, and he really didn't mince words. He was never unkind. Gene Foreman is an amazingly kind person. I mean, you look at his personal life and all he's done for foster children and all, he amazes me. And for his own children, he is so—he was not unkind, but they tested him. I think there was some thought among some of the old hands that, "Well, this will all change. We'll hold out, and it'll go away." And that's something that happens. Any time you have a major sort of attempt at change in an institution, the old folks sometimes will be welcoming it and then some of them will feel like they have a more—their interest is best vested in the way things *were*. So I came in, and at first I was covering city hall and then some other places—did a lot of court coverage—sort of general assignment work. And then pretty soon—and I don't remember how long I had been there—Gene decided that he wanted me to be assistant city editor. And I'm losing the name of the city editor at the time.

JM: Was it Ralph Patrick?

TS: No, Ralph was—it was before Ralph—well, I was the assistant city editor when Ralph came.

JM: Oh, okay.

TS: And that was great. We worked well together.

JM: Well, it was before Ralph.

TS: Yes, before Ralph—what was the guy's name?

JM: Rod Powers?

TS: Yes. Yes. Yes.

JM: Yes.

TS: And Rod was not a real assertive editor. And Fred Petrucelli, who's a delightful

guy—but Fred was the assistant city editor. And then Gene—I think about—just before Ralph came, Gene wanted me to be the assistant city editor.

JM: Okay.

TS: And I took that job on. And he told me to be very firm, because I was pretty good at rewriting and at editing. Gene was a good teacher, and I think I learned a lot. It wouldn't hold a candle to him. But he wanted me to be very assertive in making people go out and do their work. And they still were doing some rewriting, but for the most part he was saying, "Dig this story up. Go get this story for ourselves." They still did some rewriting, because that's what they *called* it.

JM: Yes.

TS: The guys would say, "Well, where are my rewrites?" And you'd give them some things clipped out of the *Gazette*, or Mabel, the clerk—wonderful clerk—would give them to me, and then I would hand them out. Well . . .

JM: That was Mabel Berry.

TS: Mabel Berry.

JM: Yes.

TS: I loved Mabel. And she knew the ropes. She knew what was going on. She knew everybody's habits. She knew which bar to get one guy out of. Mabel [laughs] was a big help because she knew a lot of numbers and names and was just an invaluable resource. She ought to get credit for that. I don't know what became of Mabel, but—is Mabel still living?

JM: No, she died just recently—just within the last two or three years—three or four years.

TS: Oh. I liked her. [Laughs] But he gave me those tasks, and I began—I mean, he told me to do that. And years later, John Robert Starr, who periodically would—long after I was away from journalism—on three or four occasions just sort of gratuitously jumped on me, and he wrote that I was Foreman’s hatchet man.

[Laughs]

JM: Yes.

TS: You know, that’s not exactly an endearing term or something that one likes to have, and I’m not—I probably still wouldn’t in polite company say, “Well, I was his hatchet man.” But in a sense, I guess—being very honest—I was because he said, “I want you to rewrite and rewrite people. If they’re not doing it right, then show them what you’re doing and don’t accept things that are sloppy.”

JM: Yes.

TS: Well, I made some people mad. I mean, you know, I was this young firebrand, and I tried to not be overbearing about it, but, I mean, he pretty well gave me a job, and I did it—probably clumsily. I’m sure I was clumsy with it at that time. I might handle such a thing better now, although I probably wouldn’t do it. But I don’t regret it. I felt like the paper needed to be redone—that it could be a good paper. So I started stirring people up pretty quickly, and I guess most notable was that I stirred George Douthit. I liked George, but I disagreed with some of George’s style, and I felt like George’s personal biases came into his stuff a lot. But he was a hard worker. I couldn’t fault him. My God, he was already fairly old. He wrote something one day that came in late already. We had an AP [Associated Press] story on it, and I think it was something to do with [Governor] Orval Faubus. I may be wrong. But he was a fan of Orval’s.

JM: Yes.

TS: Well known as a fan of Orval's, and [laughs] the story came in, and George sent a quickly written story that was just kind of impossible to follow—at least it seemed that way to me. Now, you know, maybe I was overzealous. I don't know. I just—when he came in, he said, “Did you get my story?” He kind of growled at me. I said, “Yeah, but I didn't use it. I used the AP story.” And he threw a—kind of a snot-slinging fit in the newsroom—a *horrible fit*. And I got kind of concerned because he had had a stroke one time throwing a fit, I think at the capitol. And I said, “George, calm down. You're going to have a stroke.” He said, “I've already *had* one!” “Well, you can have two or more.” And it was terrible. I'm a little hazy on these details now, but I think that's when he quit. I pretty much believe that's when he quit. And I was kind of, you know [laughs]—people would get mad at George . . .

JM: Yes.

TS: . . . but he *was* an institution around there, and so I was certainly not popular with the old crew at *that* point because I had provoked George. And I did—I *liked* George. We would argue occasionally, but I liked him, and I did feel bad about that. He went on and did his news service, and it was probably better for him—may have prolonged his life some because it wasn't as stressful. But I felt bad about that because I had rewritten some of his stuff already that made him very angry. But it was—that was a very cataclysmic day, as you might recall.

JM: Yes.

TS: Or might know. There was a guy that covered city hall, and he finally got frustrated and left. He just didn't do a very thorough job, and I got to looking at

quotes he would use, and I would read the *Gazette* and then read him, and I'd say, "Well, which—? This was a direct quote. Who was right, the *Gazette* or you? There's a significant difference." I said, "Lynwood, would you explain this?" And he said, "Oh, I change them up a little just for variety." And I said, "You don't *change* a direct quote for variety. You just don't do that. If you want to paraphrase, fine, but don't use the same—essentially the same thing as the *Gazette* and change it." So he was kind of mad. Bob Ferguson I rewrote ruthlessly. Bob was such a nice guy. Well, Bob has died in the last few years. And Bob left and went to the *Benton Courier*, and a lot of his complaint was that he was tired of my rewrites. So I was—and, again, I don't like playing that role, and I've never wanted to be in that role since because I don't like it. I was the bad guy and kind of the messenger. I was probably ruthless at times, in rewriting and in sending people back to do it themselves. We had a fellow who came in every Saturday morning—Bud Lemke.

JM: Yes.

TS: I faulted the paper over the years for not getting him help or doing something earlier—kind of forcing him to make a decision about what he was going to do with his life and his drinking. I guess now as a recovering alcoholic I can speak about that [laughs], but I—Bud, on Saturday mornings, sometimes was my only reporter, which meant I *had* none. So Bud would come early, do a few *Gazette* rewrites haphazardly, and vanish. And usually to get that little old Saturday afternoon paper out, which would float like a Kleenex when they threw them on your driveway, you had to—you didn't have a lot of time.

JM: Yes.

TS: So a few *Gazette* rewrites, some wire stuff, and we were off and running. Well, something was called—a press conference—real important—called for 9:00 one Saturday morning. Mabel got the call. She told me. I said, “Mabel, who do we have?” And I look out over this empty newsroom, and she said, “Bud’s the only one on today.” Bud would always park his car on a meter, and then when meter time came, he would come and say, “I’ve got to go move my car.” And then he’d disappear. You never saw him again. And they let him do that for *years*. Bud would be gone to the Brunswick. Apparently, they opened early over at the Brunswick because he’d go over there, or they let *him* in. So I said, “Mabel . . .”

JM: Well, much earlier than that he used to go—but this was in the afternoon—he would take off work early in the afternoon, but he would go to Peck’s Drive-In.

TS: Peck’s Drive-In. Yes, he was a Peck’s guy.

JM: Yes.

TS: But on Saturday morning he got to leave *real* early, and apparently they always let him. I think Fred Petrucelli would let him. But I’ll tell you a funny story about a quote and Fred in a minute. But I just said, “Mabel, we’ve got to have him. I don’t have anybody else. I can’t leave. We’ve got to cover this press conference.” It was something big. I don’t remember what. She said, “I can get him.” Mabel gave kind of a determined little look. But she had the number memorized, so she just dials the Brunswick Pool Hall, and Bud gets on the phone, and I heard her say, “Bud, the boss needs you.” And I could tell he was arguing from her end of the conversation.” And she says, “I don’t know. He said you need to get here immediately. *We need* you, and do not delay. Come straight to work.” Well, I was working on something, waiting on him to get there, and I

heard someone say, “Well, goodbye.” And I looked up, and Bud’s leaning over the desk, and you could smell the alcohol, and his eyes were kind of whirling. I mean, he was a *mess*. And I said, “What?” And he said, “I’m gone. I’m out of here. I quit.” I said, “What?” He said, “I don’t have to take this shit.” And I said, “Well, I just called you over to work. I believe you’re still on the clock.” And he said, “I’m out of here. I’m gone. I’m going down to see Chester and get my money.” Chester was working away.

JM: Chester Garrett.

TS: I loved Chester. We called him “man with the furrowed brow,” because you could tell how much worry he had by how many furrows in his brow.

JM: Yes.

TS: Nice man. So Bud just whirls around rather unsteadily and leaves the newsroom—went down a few minutes later. Well, Chester’s up there, and as I told Foreman later, it was—Foreman started that. He’d say, “It’s a five-furrow day.”

JM: [Laughs]

TS: I said, “Gee, it may be a six-furrow day,” because Chester came up, and he said, “What happened to *Bud*?” And I said, “He got mad and quit because I called him from the pool hall to come and *work*.” And he said, “Oh, I hate that. I hate that. He’s an institution here.” And I said, “Well—but he chose to *quit*.” And he said, “Oh, call him and apologize.” And I said, “If Foreman wants to call him and apologize, fine, or if he tells me to, but I’m not calling.” We got in a discussion. I remember saying, “I’m not going to beg him to come back because all I did was have Mabel call him to have him come work. He’s the only reporter I’ve got.

We're going to miss covering this. We'll just use AP." And he said, "Oh, I hate that. That's so sad." I said, "Well, why hasn't this paper years ago done something to help that man and get him sobered up to do some *work*? He *could*." And he said, "Well, I know, I know, but we don't want to hurt him." I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I didn't hurt him. I was just sitting here, and he came in and told me he quit." [Laughs] So he took off. He was gone. And that was kind of how it went. I had about a year of that. Ralph came along and Ralph did the same thing. Ralph needed somebody to help him with it, and he'd hand me a lot of rewrites. I used to have to rewrite Maurice Moore. Mo was—what a—just a dear man.

JM: Yes.

TS: He was so kind. And he would write those *long* stories. He would have—he would not have made it in today's environment. He'd write *long* stories that—he'd just bring a big ream of newsprint over to you and he'd have this story that would go on. He wrote—he came in one time and he wrote about how some little town down in south Arkansas was losing its medical clinic. And it never really said why the doctor was leaving. It was just an awful thing for the town. And, of course, Mo got a lot of his tips and did a lot of his stuff kind of from the chamber of commerce. Mo was very much a booster. And it was just because he was just that kind of kindhearted guy. [Laughs] And this piece went on and on, but I finally—I looked at him and looked at him and finally said, "Mo, what's this *mean*? Why is this going on? *Why* is he leaving? You've never said why the guy's leaving." He said, "Oh, it's so touchy, I just didn't want to get into it." I said, "Well, what *is* it?" And he said, "Well, this guy got involved with—"

somebody—I don't remember who. Got involved with, like, somebody in the office or something. Big scandal. There was a horrible, messy divorce, and he lost his practice in the divorce, and his wife was going to sell it, but there was nobody who'd come in and take it over, and, I mean, the *whole story* was over here to the side [laughs]. And I said, "Mo, we're not going to run *this*. You take that back over there. If you can write what's *really* going on, then write it. If you *can't* write, it, let's don't tell the public all of the pain of the town losing its doctor and all the efforts to recruit and all this other stuff and not tell them why they're losing their doctor. Probably a whole lot of them know anyway because it's gossip, but let's give them the story." And as I recall, we didn't run it. We just didn't—I mean, he didn't—he said, "I just can't get in all that."

JM: Yes. Hmm.

TS: Yes, he was just a kindhearted guy. So then at some point I became a kind of special assignment reporter. I finally told Foreman that the city desk stuff was not—it was not—I didn't—I was—temperamentally, it was really getting to me. I didn't want to hear a phone ring. I didn't want to—I was real jumpy. I probably had blood pressure problems that I didn't know about. But I went home in a foul mood. I stressed out, and that's—a young guy just stressed out. And I said, "Gene, I need relief." And he said, "Well, why don't you do special assignment and then do some of the Mo Moore-type stuff?" because Mo eventually left, as I recall, and I don't remember where he went. And he's been dead a number of years.

JM: A long time, but I can't remember whether he went to Hot Springs or *came* from Hot Springs.

TS: He might've gone to them.

JM: I think he worked at the Hot Springs paper [the *Sentinel-Record*] for a while.

TS: I think so. Just a dear guy—great, big ol' guy with a wrinkled face—kind of bulldog—not bulldog—like a sort of sad-dog face, you know? And I liked him, and it was always *really* hard to rewrite him. You just felt like you'd kicked a puppy, you know?

JM: [Laughs]

TS: But he left, so I was ready to get away from all that.

JM: Yes.

TS: I had a thing with Fred Petrucelli one time. I was covering a courthouse, and I always liked to write stuff that was a little offbeat. I always liked to do color and go look for interesting kind of sidebar stuff. And at the courthouse, you know, George Bentley was so amazing at covering *everything* that went on there.

JM: Yes.

TS: So really what was left for us and what I did a lot of on assignment later when I was at the *Gazette* was to write kind of the offbeat stuff. So old Judge Kirby, who was not our most distinguished man on the bench ever—he was a cynical guy that just would say anything from the bench.

JM: William J. Kirby.

TS: William J. Kirby. Someone told me once that he knew nothing about the law and had no curiosity about it.

JM: [Laughs]

TS: Used that old cliché. But Judge Kirby—I would quote his sidebar comments he made in court. One of them got in the Supreme Court brief once, because he just

made them, and his clerk, who I really liked—I think she's still around—no, Maude died. But his clerk would just not put those in the—the court reporters would—they'd see to it those didn't get in.

JM: Yes.

TS: I wrote a story once—Kirby was getting a little heat, I think, from the *Gazette* because these bail bondsmen put up all these bonds, and they never had to pay a dime even if the guy didn't show up. So it was pure gravy—ten percent fee—and you never had—you would never have to pay off. So Kirby started having what he called judgment day. And he'd call old—those bail bondsmen in there, and he would say, “Okay, it's judgment day. I want to know about this case.” And he'd go over the cases, and then he'd charge them. Finally, he got up on some of them to fifty cents on the dollar—most of the time not—but most of them, he said, “We'll wait until the next time.” So they didn't pay off but a few thousand dollars. And he had a guy that—one of the bail bondsmen came in one day and they were talking about it—called up this case. He said, “Well, this is a first-degree murder case.” It was a bond—the guy had vanished and never had shown up. Ted Hood was the bondsman, and Ted said, “Oh, judge, that was just some ol' nigger he killed, and *he* was a nigger.” And I'm over there writing it down just like he said it. So I wrote a direct quote in there. “It was just some ol' nigger he killed.” I used “nigger.”

JM: Yes.

TS: Because that's what he *said*. And I thought it was important because he didn't have to pay off on it—that it was purely racial. I mean, Kirby, you know, kind of, “Okay.” And [laughs] I wrote that, and Fred Petrucelli changed it to “Oh, Judge,

it was just some old Negro he killed.” [Laughs] Well, Ted Hood never said Negro in his life, you know? And I was just [laughs] livid about it. I went to him—Foreman said to him, “You know, if we’re going to quote, we quote. If we’re not going to quote, we don’t quote.” So it was—but I liked Fred. He was a happy guy, you know? But that was kind of how it went there. It was just a different kind of newsroom. It wouldn’t survive today.

JM: Well, let’s see now. Ralph came in, so Rod Powers must’ve left.

TS: Rod left. He kind of got tired of the deal, too, and Ralph came in.

JM: Yes, I guess he was—I think he went to Modesto, California—*Modesto Bee*.

TS: I believe he did—the *Modesto*—I remember he got an offer from the *Modesto Bee*. And did he stay out there?

JM: Yes, he did. But he died about six months ago.

TS: Oh, really?

JM: Yes. But he—and then I don’t know whether he went before him or after him—Martin Holmes went to Modesto also.

TS: Yes.

JM: I don’t know whether Martin was there when you were.

TS: No, but I knew about him.

JM: Okay. So he may have gone first.

TS: Yes, old Rod—you know, we had Leon Hatch over . . .

JM: Yes.

TS: Leon Hatch was legendary. Of course, he had—Leon had fallen victim to the bottle—bad, bad way also. But, you know, in his day, during the 1957 [Little Rock Central High School integration] crisis, he distinguished himself covering

for the AP, wasn't it

JM: Yes, he was with the AP.

TS: *Bright* man.

JM: Yes.

TS: And he was wonderful over on the news desk—on the rim—because he would look up—he practically memorized the phone book, and he would tip on stories like the Friday firm's predecessor—I remember there was a couple of them retired and didn't announce it, and he happened to notice in the phone book that the name had changed, and he had gone to Foreman and told him [laughs]. "That's changed. I wonder what happened" Well, it turned out to be a pretty good story—I mean, an interesting story. These old guys that had been known—prominent, prominent lawyers had gone—Leon was always coming up with stuff. You know the story of—Leon was quite a grammarian.

JM: You're not talking about the . . .

TS: The Mutt Jones story? [Laughs]

JM: Well . . .

TS: Did Gene—? [That was at?] Mutt's place, wasn't it?

JM: Well, no, no. If it's the same story I'm thinking about, you . . .

TS: The man and the woman arguing?

JM: Yes.

TS: Yes. Yes. Foreman loves that story.

JM: Okay. Well, the actual truth of the matter is that I was *there* that day.

TS: Oh, my gosh!

JM: And I think it was out on Lake Conway . . .

TS: Yes.

JM: And I think it was Ellis Fagan's place.

TS: Oh, okay.

JM: It was a state senator from Little Rock, and I believe it was Ellis's place.

TS: [Laughs]

JM: But that *is* a true story.

TS: [Laughs] You were there?

JM: Yes, I was.

TS: I have never met anyone who was *there*, and I—you know, Gene, who seldom said a foul word . . .

JM: Yes.

TS: One day Leon had gotten real upset about some grammatical error that somebody had made, and just raising Cain—and Gene was working the slot, and he said, “You know that grammar, don't you?” And Leon kind of put his head down because that story was all around. But I liked Leon.

JM: Well, we might as well end the suspense here and go ahead and tell the story.

TS: Yes, I'll tell the—yes, you know the story. You can tell the story.

JM: And you correct me if you heard it in a different version. I'm not going to say who the people were.

TS: Yes, yes.

JM: But it was prominent politician.

TS: Yes, yes.

JM: And the male had been in the house quite a while with another woman. And the rest of us were out sitting around a little fire. I think they were cooking catfish

and stuff and everything, and they walk out, and this guy's wife says, "Well, who's been [expletive] *who*?" And Leon said, "Ma'am! You mean "who's been [expletive] *whom*?"

TS: Yes. [Laughs]

JM: Is that it?

TS: Yes, that's it. [Laughs]

JM: Is that it?

TS: Yes, that's it.

JM: Yes.

TS: You know, Foreman—when he got the paper out that day, he said, "You know what I was alluding to?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, come here in the office and I'll tell you."

JM: That was it. [Laughs]

TS: And I have told that story over the years because it was so *Leon*, you know?

JM: Yes.

TS: You know, "Who was fucking *whom*?" I loved it. I loved it.

JM: Yes. Yes.

TS: But he was an interesting guy. Of course, you know the news desk—the copy editors have gone away in most places.

JM: Yes.

TS: Which was sad.

JM: Still is.

TS: It's still sad, and they're *gone*. Foreman had told me about that a few years ago, long after he was at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and said, you know, he lamented it,

but economics—they decided they would do that. And you can tell it in the papers.

JM: Yes.

TS: Because those good copy editors were sticklers for good grammar and everything. But it was an interesting era. I guess I look back over my life and I've done several different things. I don't regret the time I spent over there because I learned a lot of stuff. I learned some stuff about myself that I needed to learn—that was what I could handle and what I couldn't handle and what I ought to improve on. [Laughter] But I still had a lot to learn when I left there. But I don't regret those days, and I do regret—you know, I don't know what I could've done differently on Douthit because I actually—as I recall, I had told Gene, you know, "I'm going to use the AP because this is gibberish." And Gene said, "Go on."

JM: Yes.

TS: But I felt bad. I liked George. And, my God, he could've stroked out right there in the newsroom and died.

JM: Yes.

TS: But I—some of the other guys—I thought, "Man, if you'd just work at it a little bit and just let us help you, you'll make it here." But change is never easy when you've got it so entrenched, and it does in a lot of leaders, you know? I wasn't a leader, but I was *working* for the leader. [Laughs] And I think after a couple of years that Marcus and Stanley sort of had begun to wonder just how much they wanted to change. They were nice guys. Stanley really didn't have interest in the news stuff and Marcus did. Now, there was one other story I need to tell you.

Gene handed me my most challenging task—was to begin editing the church page

after Miss Lelia Maude Funston finished her work on it. Well, the church page [laughs]—Miss Funston was a sweet little spinster lady—they called them spinsters still then—who wore a wig and a lot of rouge, and was very much a church lady.

JM: Yes.

TS: And a nice woman. But she lived in a sheltered little world, and she didn't have much to do with us. Actually, she once told a friend of mine, who called up there with a news item, that she didn't know if she could get it in or not because the Communists had taken over the paper. [Laughs] So—Gene told me, and I told her, "I'm going to be editing your copy, and you're supposed to give all your copy to me." I said, "We're going to have your style match the style that we are implementing in the rest of the paper." And I think that she just kind of nodded, and I think she was thinking inside, "We'll *see* about that." Well, Gene was big on second references. "I don't care if you're Doctor, Reverend, or whatever—second reference—you don't have a *title*." And that was a longstanding Foreman thing that I'd been imbued with at the *Pine Bluff Commercial*. So he said, "I'm tired of Brother this and Reverend this. Everybody will use the same style." I said, "Okay." And he said, "Some of this stuff just looks like it came out of a church bulletin, and you need to get—just change it. Rewrite it. And some of it just throw out." "Okay." So he said he'd give her some notes explaining stuff. So I did find that she had a good sense of humor because she would—I would write her notes, and she would respond, and we got to having a little fun with it. She was mad, but she would respond well. And I sent her—she sent me one one day, and she cited a scripture out of [the Holy Bible, Book of] *Matthew*, and I

wrote and told her, “Don’t do this anymore.” I don’t remember what heinous sin it was—journalistic sin. And she wrote and said, “I shall not.” And then she had put down at the bottom—she put, “Agree with thine adversary quickly.” And she put a scriptural quote, and I thought that was good. So, having had a little exposure to Biblical things in my earlier floundering around—actually, I was a Methodist supply pastor for a time, so I—you know, flopped around the pages of the Bible. So I would dig up some quotes and send them back to her. And one of them—and I sent back to that one is “They shall come to me and I shall be their judge.” I don’t know *where* I found that.

JM: [Laughs]

TS: God, what hubris. And I sent that back, and she kind of laughed, and so, you know, it went on for a while. We were sending notes. And Foreman was just eating it up. I wish I’d saved all of them. And she’d keep committing the atrocities, but Gene loved it. So I went in to him one day and said, “I’ve really found a great one that we’ll do when she retires.” Of course, Gene’s pretty serious, and I said, “I got this over in Song of Solomon. It says, ‘Weep no more, oh thou oppressed virgin.’” [Laughs] And I was so proud of it. Gene just—you know, he could kind of turn ashen, and he said . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

TS: . . . they don’t—they want it all there. But Miss Funston . . .

JM: Just a minute. This is Jerry McConnell, and this is [Side] Two of the interview with Tucker. And you were saying, Tucker, I believe, about this one Biblical quote that Foreman told you to never use.

TS: Yes, make sure we got it on the tape. I kind of saw it as the *piece de resistance*, you know? This would be the final thing when she left, because we were planning her retirement—Gene was—and he would share with me what his plans were. And I found this quote out of—I think out of Song of Solomon. But I went to him, and I said, “I’ve got a great one for when she leaves, and it’s ‘Weep no more, oh thou oppressed virgin.’” And he just turned ashen and said, “No, we don’t want to ever use that.” [Laughs] Anyway . . .

JM: I might—at this point, we’ve used this—it has come up again, but I will for the benefit of the typist here, I will spell it. Lelia Maude Funston is L-E-L-I-A M-A-U-D-E F-U-N-S-T-O-N, if I remember correctly.

TS: Lelia Maude Funston.

JM: So she was there when I was there in 1951.

TS: Oh, my God! Well, she told the person that she said where the Communists had taken over, and she told *me* one more than one occasion, “I gave birth to this page. I’m the first one that developed a church page, and I’ve edited it for forty years,” and implied—somehow got across the notion that God was the real *editor*. And she did. That’s—what she said to me was—she said, “This is a work of God, and it’s important.” And she said, “When you do what you’ve been doing to this page, you are fooling with the work of God” or “messing with the work of God.” I’m sure it was something discreet. But, I mean, I said, “Well—” and I did say to her on that occasion, you know, “I’ve had some people get mad about being edited, but I’ve never been told that I was, you know, fooling with the Almighty.” We didn’t get along. I mean, we had a sort of tense relationship. But the page needed—if you were going to do the paper over, you had to remake the

page. But, still, I'm sure callow youth showed through. But Gene wanted her to retire. He said—he would go to Marcus George and say, “You know, we can't do anything with that page, and really expand it and make it something good unless she retires.” And no one knew exactly how old she was. She was way up there. So, finally, he went in once and said, “Marcus, we're just not going to be able to do it. We need to—why don't you let her take her Social Security and give her a small stipend.” He said, “I figured it out what she would get. She would be able to retire and not have the expense of coming down here—not have to work—and she would have just as much spendable income.” So Marcus thought about it, and he said—because Gene related it to me—he said, “Let's wait until it snows.” Marcus was real big on pivotal dates. “Let's do that after Christmas.” “Let's do that—” One time Gene came in and said, “Well, we're probably going to have to wait until Ash Wednesday.” He was going to present another thing—you know? [Laughs] But we had a lot of fun about pivotal dates. Well, Marcus really said to him, “Let's wait until it snows.” Well, Gene, you know, pressing on very directly. He said, “What does *snow* have to do with her retiring?” “Well, just think about it. She'll have to take a cab. She'll get out out front. The sidewalk—she comes in early—the sidewalks won't be shoveled yet. She'll have a terrible time getting in the door, and you've got those steps up to the door, and they'll be icy. And she'll come in, and I'll just call her in and say, ‘Wouldn't it have been nice if you could've just stayed home?’” [Laughs] Gene and I were gone before it snowed.

JM; Yes. [Laughs]

TS: So Gene got the job at *Newsday* because Gene was a—obviously, there's now a

chair at the University of Pennsylvania—a chair in his honor. I mean, he’s just a brilliant, brilliant editor.

JM: Well, this is covered in other places, but before he’d gone to Pine Bluff, he’d been at *The New York Times*.

TS: Yes!

JM: And then they went out on strike, and so that’s how he . . .

TS: That’s why he came back.

JM: That’s why he came back.

TS: He had a family. Yes.

JM: And then later went to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and produced I don’t know how many Pulitzer Prize-winning . . .

TS: Oh, he was just amazing. So when he . . .

JM: So this was about—did you come in right after—pretty soon after he did?

TS: Yes.

JM: [He?] came there in 1968.

TS: I came in 1968.

JM: And then he left in 1971.

TS: Yes, early 1971. I was there 1968 to 1971.

JM: Okay.

TS: And then Gene told me, “I got this job up there,” and he had said, you know, “If you’re interested in going—” I said, “No, I don’t want to leave the state. My kids are settled here. I don’t think we’d be interested in going.” But, while it was tempting, I said, “You know, I’d had some offers from the *Gazette*,” and had one not long before he left. So I just—actually, right after he announced—it was

announced that he was leaving, I got another call, because I had told Gene—I said, “I’m going to see if I can still exercise and accept that offer and go to the *Gazette*,” because that’s really where I had set my heart on being because, you know, it was a wonderful paper, and also, you know, it was where my daddy worked, and he had retired—I guess he had retired by—yes, he had retired by then. But I pretty quickly—after Gene left—I very quickly gave notice—they called me—I think Leroy Donald called me. Nelson—A. R. Nelson had told him to call me and see if I’d come over. So I went over and talked to Nelson, and agreed to come to work, and came back and gave two weeks’ notice, and—because Gene had not left yet. He was going to.

JM: Yes.

TS: And I gave two weeks’ notice, and Marcus sent word to Gene back to tell me that, no, this was not necessary. And that was their habit. If you went to the *Gazette*, you were gone, you know? And so the *Gazette* had already told me, “They’ll probably tell you go to on when you’re coming here.”

JM: That worked the other way, too.

TS: I know it did. Yes, it worked both ways. Yes. You just—and, you know, there are instances where that’s okay, you know?

JM: Because, you know, that—I replaced Foreman.

TS: Yes.

JM: And you were gone by then.

TS: Yes.

JM: I know you were gone. But I replaced Foreman. When I went in to tell Orville, I told him—I’d been working for him for sixteen years. I told him I’d give him

three weeks' notice. He said, "Jerry, you might as well go ahead and go tomorrow."

TS: Wow. Wow. Well, I knew that they did that, too.

JM: Yes.

TS: It's just that old competition there, and I'd said, "Hey, that's great." I didn't want to hang around as a lame duck there.

JM: Yes, sure.

TS: And so I went on over there, and then after Foreman went to the *Inquirer*, he called me one day and said, "Would you like to come up here and work." And I went. I didn't—I had a kind of bad experience there for a lot of reasons, one of which was that I was, you know, suffering from pretty bad depression, and got up there and got very depressed. My family hated it. My son was fine. My daughter cried all the time. [Laughs] My wife didn't like it. I was—it was—and I was depressed. I was depressed before I went up there. That was a problem I'm happy I don't have anymore, but I did have—that kind of lead to my next career—treatment for depression. So I'm very open about it. But I got up there, and I was depressed—had lots of opportunity. Foreman, again, was very good to me. I was for a time bureau chief over at the Trenton [New Jersey] bureau.

JM Oh.

TS: But covering New Jersey politics was very difficult. I had no grounding in it, you know? It was a different ball game. First six months I was there, six legislators were indicted with alleged Mafia connections.

JM: That would probably be a new ball game.

TS: Yes, totally new, you know?

JM: New Jersey politics.

TS: Oh, yes. They were rough and tumble. But, anyway, that's how—so I followed Foreman there, and then I left the *Gazette*—went up there, and then one day I said, “I can't take this anymore.” I was really feeling bad, and I called Bob Douglas, and I said, “Do you think I could come back?” He said, “Well, let me go talk to Hugh [Patterson].” The only thing that saved me, I think, was—he was always really nice to me. He was super nice. But—as they *all* were at the *Gazette*. But Hugh loved my daddy. My daddy had been retired for nearly fifteen years when he died, and Hugh was at his funeral. He wrote me a nice letter. He said he didn't want my daddy to retire. He really liked him. And I think that saved me. [Laughs] But whatever it took, I came back to the *Gazette* and . . .

JM: Well, that probably was also thanks to A. R. Nelson having been retired by then.

TS: Yes, it was. Nelson wouldn't have—oh, if you left, you didn't come back.

JM: He wouldn't take you. So Douglas had replaced Nelson, right, as managing editor?

TS: Yes. And Douglas had known my father since Douglas was a young man.

JM: Yes.

TS: See, he was younger, of course, than my father, and he liked my father. Bob and I really got along well. I really, really learned a lot from him. So I went, you know, and I took one little hiatus and worked for David Pryor, and they took me back after that. I mean, I worked for David in his 1972 campaign that he lost and, you know . . .

JM: Was that the senate campaign?

TS: Yes, against [John] McClellan.

JM: Yes.

TS: David is—of all the politicians I’ve met over the years, I’ve retained my admiration for him. I have—I just admire him for many, many reasons. And politics was *not* something I did well. I just didn’t. But I really respect—I came out of there respecting David, and still do.

JM: Yes.

TS: I run into him occasionally, and just think a lot of him. But they took me back after that four-month stint. So I appreciated it.

JM: You left the *Gazette* and went to work for David and then went back again.

TS: Yes, they rarely do that.

JM: Yes.

TS: But I came to them before the runoff, and I said—well, actually, before the primary. I said, “I could go to Washington [DC] if he wins. He can’t promise that, but I know I could go to Washington, and I thought—” But I said, “This isn’t what I need to do.” And they said, “Well, are you willing to say *now* that even if he wins—” and he had a good shot at it—“you’re not going?” And I said, “Yes.” And they said, “Well, see through your obligation to him and then you can come back.” And so I did. Never seemed to cause any problems. I’ve been lucky, you know, with a lot of things. So I stayed there then a few more years, and then I went to graduate school—social work.

JM: You’ve been doing social work since then?

TS: Yes, I worked in a mental health clinic for a number of years as a therapist, and then I was in private practice. And then I ended up sort of accidentally—I mean, it really was just kind of a fluke that I ended up in a position where I got to found

a rehabilitation program that's now eighteen years old for people with serious mental illness. And I was just fortunate. It was a unique program and there were not any real good guidelines for how to do it, and I had a lot of fun with it. I felt like we have done a lot of good after running it for seventeen years. It was pretty big, you know? It served 300 very disabled folks—had about 250 employees. It was around-the-clock community placement, and some group homes. We just were everywhere.

JM: What was the name of it?

TS: Birch Tree Communities.

JM: Spell it.

TS: B-I-R-C-H. Birch Tree Communities, Incorporated.

JM: Okay.

TS: It's based in Benton.

JM: Okay.

TS: And there are now twelve locations around the state. And I led that for all those years, but I got very weary with the bureaucracy we had to deal with. We were purely Medicaid-funded, and the struggle was exhausting. And I retired. I grew tired of—I felt rather useless. I had always felt like I was—most of the time I've been fortunate being able to do something where I've felt like I could make some difference. I've always had this kind of notion you ought to try to do something worthwhile wherever you are. It was just sort of a passion that I bumbled about a lot. I don't claim any expertise at that. But I was really proud of what we did, and so many people contributed to that effort—starting that program and running that program. And so I retired and I got into just feeling that I was not very useful

anymore and very disconnected—drank too much. [Laughs] Old newspaper habit, right? [Laughs] A lot of our fellows did, and I did in the earlier days, but I'd kind of—I'd drank too much, and then I kind of had an epiphany about that. And I said—they had been wanting me to come back and do clinical work. They promised no administrative—just come back and do it, because I loved doing that, and I liked teaching. And so they [laughs]—my friend was running the program. We go back thirty-one years, and so I—but after I quit drinking, I became active in AA [Alcoholics Anonymous], and I said, “I'll go back to work.” So I went back to work, and what I'm doing now is—you've heard an example a while ago [laughs] because I took that call. But I work with people who not only have a major mental illness like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, but also have problems with drugs or alcohol.

JM: Yes.

TS: And I felt like that was something I could do. So that's where—that's how I've ended up.

JM: That's what you're doing now. Okay.

TS: That's about my story. You got any questions?

JM: Yes, just a minute.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Tucker, this has been some great stuff. This is what I've really been looking for. But let's go back—talking about the *Democrat*. When you first went there, what was your overall opinion of their news operation? Were they just coasting—a bunch of people been there too long or weren't being pushed, or what was going on?

TS: It was bad. There was just very little in the way of enterprise. There was no real digging. Douthit did more than anybody because he had a lot of news sources, but Douthit was a complicated writer to read, and he had his pretty strong biases. And that affected what he was able to do. And other than that, you had almost no sort of journalistic enterprise. My opinion of it was that it was pretty dim. It was a pretty bad operation. It was—people were not paid real well. They had accepted being second place. They were the afternoon paper. They were resigned to that. I didn't find anybody taking a lot of pride in doing anything. Some newer ones wanted to. Bob Ferguson wanted to. He had some problems with writing, but he wanted to do more. But he didn't always know what to do. You had Maurice Moore. Nobody worked harder than Mo. I mean, he was just—he worked and worked and worked, and his health wasn't real good. He fought that horrible weight problem.

JM: Yes.

TS: Of course, he lost a lot of weight, and he just—remember his skin was just in folds?

JM: Yes.

TS: But he worked really hard at losing that weight because he had some health problems. But he really wanted to be enterprising, and he would just work—he would just *labor* over his stories. But, by and large, they were the rewrite organization.

JM: Yes.

TS: And somebody would say, “Well, I’ve got my rewrites done.” And they’d come over to the desk and say, “You got my rewrites?” I hated that word. I *hated*

hearing people say rewrites. “Well, why don’t *we* have a story? Why don’t *we* have this story?” So, summing it up, I think it was a very slipshod operation that was pretty much like Mr. Engel had run it for years. Mr. Engel was a little close with a dollar.

JM: Yes.

TS: And he—and I knew something about him and his style because my father—there was an exchange program that sometimes if they were shorthanded, my father would work an extra day, and he’d go work at the *Democrat*.

JM: Yes.

TS: And I think he and Mr. Engel got along very well, but he didn’t have a lot of respect for the way he ran an operation because it was just on the cheap.

JM: Yes.

TS: And my father just—he really liked Hugh Patterson. I mean, they clicked, and he had a lot respect—even though my father, I guess, politically, like in that era, was pretty conservative. But he had a tremendous respect for Mr. Heiskell.

JM: Yes.

TS: And he had a lot of respect for the paper during the 1957 crisis, you know? He took a lot of pride in it. “We’re going on running those press runs,” you know? But he knew Mr. Engel and I never heard him say anything unkind other than to kind of joke about how close with a dollar he was. So that was the paper. There wasn’t a lot to it, and it was kind of interesting that after Marcus and Stanley had worked under their uncle all those years, that they came in—I think, really *did* want to do something with it, but they weren’t sure what that would entail. That was the problem.

JM: I think maybe particularly Marcus did want to do something about it.

TS: Yes. Now, Stanley just kind of came along. Stanley was sort of adrift when he came to journalism. I remember him coming up one time—some name confused him. Oh, it was *my* name. He saw that my name—had seen it on something—I’d used the initial C. Tucker Steinmetz, and he said, “I don’t know why some people—they won’t use their first name,” and then he walked out of the room. And somebody said, “Well, he signs his name C. Stanley Berry.” [Laughs] And it was really funny. I guess he hadn’t thought about that. But Stanley—I didn’t have a—you know, didn’t see him much. I liked Marcus, but Marcus *did* want to do something. But, you’re right—he had to drag Stanley along.

JM: And I don’t know how much wherewithal they had and everything because they were still losing money and circulation, I think.

TS: Oh, yes.

JM: Because I’ve discovered since then—I’ve never inquired into that when I took the job. [Laughs]

TS: Yes.

JM: But they were still losing money.

TS: They were losing, and they had really inherited a debt-maker.

JM: Yes.

TS: And so a lot of forces came together that made it that way.

JM: But I know—you know, McCord came over, too, and took over the editorial page.

TS: Yes.

JM: And Bob and—and I think Bob and Marcus both wanted to do something, and I’m sure that’s why they hired Gene.

TS: Oh, yes. Bob—I *loved* working around Bob. I am a big admirer of his and still see him occasionally. Occasionally I'll see him at the theater or something. I do a little acting, and I see him.

JM: But the *Gazette* was in your view then, at that time, a far superior paper?

TS: Oh, yes.

JM: Yes.

TS: No doubt about it. Yes.

JM: Let me ask you another—and this is the thread that has run through some of our interviews and everything—do you think newspapermen drink—newspaper *people*, maybe—do they drink more than other occupations or . . . ?

TS: Well, you know I haven't seen any studies on it, but just anecdotally, it would appear to me—and I've read enough of just what journalists have written about—that would drink a lot.

JM: Yes.

TS: When I went to work, I never had a drink until I was twenty-six, and I went to work at the *Commercial* not long after that. And, man, I got let loose on some good parties. We used to go to Harry Pearson's apartment and have these legendary parties, and just did a lot of drinking. I did a good bit when I was at the *Democrat* and a good bit at the *Gazette*. But I didn't drink like—I wouldn't have—I would have been divorced sooner if I'd have been going like some of those guys went every afternoon.

JM: Yes.

TS: Like, you know, you talk about Bud went to Peck's.

JM: Yes, he got off work and . . .

TS: Yes.

JM: He took off at least an hour early . . .

TS: Well . . .

JM: . . . before he was supposed to, and then he went out on Markham out there.

TS: Yes, I can picture that place.

JM: And go to Peck's Drive-In.

TS: Go out there and drink.

JM: Yes.

TS: Well, you had a lot of guys who went to the Officers' Club from the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes.

TS; Jerry—no, he had the three—who worked in there with Jerry Dhonau? The red-faced . . .

JM: Jerry Neal?

TS: Jerry Neal, yes—brilliant man.

JM: Yes.

TS: Jerry went to the Officers' Club, and some others went to the Officers' Club.

JM: Yes.

TS: But I don't know. I guess that—I think if you looked at occupations, there may be some surveys out there. My impression is that they *did*. I know that a lot of the broadcast guys have kind of had a problem because they walk in, you know—the pretty guys—they walk into a bar, and people are buying them drinks. They don't have to buy a drink because they're a TV star. And for some of them that's been real rough. [Laughs]

JM: I know that when I went to the *Democrat* in 1951, that we had several on the staff

that were hard drinkers.

TS: Yes.

JM: And several of the editors that were hard drinkers and kept a bottle on the premises somewhere.

TS: Wow.

JM: But, at any rate—but, of course, as you have discussed, you did lose a lot of the old-timers after you and Gene came in there and everything.

TS: Yes.

JM: But Gene also *hired* a lot of good . . .

TS: He hired some real good people.

JM: Some good people.

TS: Yes, he really did. And that's what's *fun*. Gene has a knack for hiring people.

You know, he hired some good ones. Once in a while he'd get a dud, but all of us who have hired have done that.

JM: Oh, you bet.

TS: We—[laughs] we have some stories that we still swap when we get together, about some people that—particularly, at the *Commercial*.

JM: Yes.

TS: But he hired some talented people who were doing some really good writing about stuff.

JM: Yes.

TS: And he let them—he gave them a lot of leeway because Gene's a creative guy when it comes—and he's creative with people. You know, at the *Commercial*, that's why—you had a lot of journalists come out of the *Commercial* while he

was there.

JM: Yes, that's true.

TS: Because he'd say, "Go try that out. Go do that."

JM: Yes.

TS: You know, look back over my life at people I've worked under that I have tremendous respect for, and Gene is really right there at probably the top. It's because of his—in his profession—just what he taught me. He and a fellow that is now running Birch, who I did an internship under in social work, and he later worked for me, and we've gone back and forth. But they were two people that had that kind of professionalism that I—that, to me, gave me a lot. And Gene could deal with my—you know, if I was impulsive or a little passionate and didn't control it as well. [Laughs] He was a good monitor, so I'm forever in his debt. I have a lot of respect for him.

JM: Okay, Tucker, this has been a great interview. Anything that we haven't touched on that might come to mind that you want to mention, or have we covered the territory.

TS: Oh, I think we've covered it. I guess I've forgotten a lot of stuff. It's been fun to go back and think about it. I mean, some of it, I guess, is kind of, I think. And then I think, "Wow, I wonder what I'd do with that now?" But I don't spent a lot of time with that. I really kind of live right in the present, and it's just been good. I appreciate being invited to participate.

JM: Well, you worked on both newspapers at some key juncture and I appreciate your taking the time to do this.'

[Recording stops at 00:74:31]

[End of Interview]

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